

The Facts about Assessments



Toward preparing students to be college, career, and culturally ready graduates

Alaska will assess students on our career- and college-ready English language arts and mathematics standards beginning in spring 2015.

The selection process

Alaska has sent out a request for proposals from assessment contractors. Proposals will be opened on November 8, 2013, and a contractor might be selected by December, 15, 2013. The assessments, which are summative, will cover grades 3 through 11 in English language arts and mathematics.

Alaska is asking proposers to bid on one or more of several options: custom-developed assessments using only Alaska-owned test items, or commercially available, published, or vendor-owned assessments.

Bidders also may offer proposals for interim assessments, which can be used throughout the school year to measure student progress, and for formative resources to support educators in their classroom instruction.

Any assessments that Alaska selects must be aligned with our career- and college-ready standards and be free of bias.

Additionally, the standards must provide valid, reliable, and comparable results across the grades. This is essential to assessing student growth, which is an important principle of Alaska's school accountability system (the Alaska School Performance Index) and the state's regulations for educator evaluations.

The request for proposals does not require that contractors offer the assessments in computerized form. Alaska will consider all

options in administering assessments to students.

Student privacy

Federal laws ([the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008](#), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the [Education Reform Sciences Act of 2002](#), and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)) prohibit the creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information.

An assessment vendor, selected through our state's procurement system, will be contracted to score the assessments for Alaska, regardless of whom we buy the assessments from. Districts submit student-level data files to secure servers maintained by our testing vendor.

Alaska ensures that the data files are protected by the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Alaska's privacy laws. All portals holding student-level data are password-protected and have firewall protection. Data files use encryption methods to assure that intercepted data cannot be compromised.

Regardless of what assessment or vendor the state chooses, the federal government will not have access to personally identifiable data about students.

Computerized assessments

Computerized assessments can be *computer-adaptive* assessments. Computer-adaptive assessments provide more accurate scores for all students across the full range of the achievement continuum. Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the

difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered, helping teachers to differentiate instruction.

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development is committed to helping districts transition to next-generation assessments. The department has prepared a Technology Readiness Tool, which helps schools identify and report key readiness indicators, including number and type of computers; local network and bandwidth infrastructure; local staff resources; and other information to evaluate readiness for computerized assessments.

Higher-quality assessments

Whatever assessments we select will require students to demonstrate critical and creative thinking. More of the test items than now will require written responses, and fewer will be fill-in-the-bubble items. More test items will require students to read complex texts closely and cite details in the text. More of the math items will be multiple-step problems, calling on students to recall math facts and apply principles and strategies. The nature of Alaska's new standards, and therefore the new assessments, is to value knowledge, practical application, and understanding. This gives us a more complex definition of proficiency.

Because the new standards are more rigorous than the former standards, and because schools are still learning how to instruct in the new standards, fewer students initially may score at the proficient level than in previous years. The state assessments are not pass/fail tests. Students who score at the basic or below basic levels have not failed the tests. The students and their schools haven't failed.

All of us should think of the assessment results from 2015 as a new baseline for a new goal: We want to understand which students are on track to graduate academically ready for the next step in their lives. Because we have new, more rigorous goals, we can't compare the 2015 results with earlier tests.

For more information, please visit the EED website at <http://education.alaska.gov> and click on the "assessments" star.

